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R O S C I U S,

A

P O E M.

[Price One Shilling.]





R O S C I U S:

OR, A

CRITICAL EXAMINATION.

INTO THE

MERITS of all the principal PERFORMERS.

BELONGING TO

NORWICH THEATRE.

For the last Season.

N O R W I C H:

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MDCCLXVII.



SIR THO: MAYNARD HESILRIGE.



R O S C I U S.

TO please myself, and to oblige a Friend;
Candour with Judgment equally to blend:

(Fond of the Drama; as I know its worth)

Only to give my private Thoughts their birth,

My infant Muse, now soars to public view;

The task advent'rous, as th'attempt is new:

Unmov'd by prejudice, no partial Thought

Handed through malice, to the public's brought;

No mean desire to stigmatize a Name,

Dictates my verse, to deviate into shame;

Critic's, with envy, never shou'd engage,

Or stain their lines with infamy and rage.

A

CURS'D

CURS'D be the Muse, but doubly curs'd the Bard,
Whose words envenom'd, or whose Heart's so hard
To trace the smallest Error, from its source,
Call it a Fault, and make that Fault much worse:
Preponderate largely on the least offence,
And stile it want of decency and sense —
So *Kelly* wrote, and malice wing'd his muse
Beyond all censure, down to rank abuse.

To mark true merit on the living page,
Kindly to hand it, down from age to age;
Which altho' great, may unrecorded lie,
And gen'uine worth may disregarded die:
Pity from what we once could pleasure find,
To charm the senses, and improve the mind;
That no surviving Beauty can be found,
Able to spread its Eulogies around!
Asserts its claim to everlasting fame,
And tell futurity the Actors name.

THESE, are my motives, and with this Intent,
 Have made my *Roscus* on his Sons comment;
 Prais'd each perfection, that I cou'd discern,
 And drew their failings with a kind concern. —
 But where no specious merit crost my aim,
 Have found no room to censure or condemn.

'GAINST GRIFFITH, tho' in Comedy renown'd;
 What infinite objections have been found!
 But then by whom? By none, the Bard replies,
 Who're over-candid, or who're over-wise.
 Oft has his name, the ridicule been made
 Of men, whom malice prompted to degrade;
 But when some private grudge lets envy loose,
*Not Satire that, but scandalous abuse.**

A 2

PROCEED

* This Line was address'd to Mr. POPE, on his ridiculing the Person of JAMES MOORE SMYTHE, Esq; in the *Dunciad*, in excuse for which, that Gentleman afterwards publickly declar'd, he was not the Author of such maltreatment, tho' it was evident he gave a Sanction to it, by a publication in his own writings.

PROCEED then, GRIFFITH, such mean arts despise;
In spite of Envy, shall thy merits rise—
Just to thy powers, due reward receive;
In ARCHERS, ATALLS, RANGERS, WILDAIRS, live.
Or when in BRASS, or PLUME; see paid at will
In gen'ral plaudits, homage to thy skill.
Why can'st Thou then, without the least pretence,
Mistake thy talents, and arraign thy sense?

Lo! some bold Veteran, renown'd in arms;
Inur'd to Marches, skilful in Alarms,
Compleat with ev'ry military art;
Eager for action, of intrepid heart,
Fearless of death, the Trumpets sound attend,
Bears on the Foe, nor ever heeds his end.
Now shou'd this Man, to counteract his fate
(Although in this department truly great)
Vainly attempt a naval Power to guide,
Cruise o'er the Main, or rule upon the tide.

Though

Though great difasters, thou'd his steps enthal,
Contempt, not Pity, wou'd attend his fall.

So, ever GRIFFITH, when thou quit thy Sphere,
And 'gainst thyself, in Tragedy appear;
I need not tell with what regret thou'rt seen,
'Tis plainly shewn, when that a WILDAIR's mein,
Betrays those honours, all usurp'd thou bear'ft;
And spite of dignity a RANGER wear'ft.

In gayer Scenes of life, thy merit's shewn,
Let grave, sententious SOMERVILLE, alone;
But if to humour, thou assert'ft a Claim,
An OGLEBY. shall aggrandize thy Name;
With pleasure there, might ever be receiv'd,
And what thou'ft lost by error, be retriev'd.

WHERE Nature teach the Actor how to play,
And plain good sense marks out th'unerring way;

Reason, with judgment equally combin'd,
 To speak the labours of the Poets mind;
 Strictly to feel the Character he bears,
 And is no more, than what he then, appears.
 Where qualities so rare as these unite,
 And points out sterling merit to our sight;
 Call forth deserv'd applause, to grace the Man,
 Who builds his fame upon so just a plan.

'Tis thine, then HOLLAND, eminently thine;
 See where a FALSTAFF, where a FAIRFIELD, shine!
 Recall those Scenes so lately we beheld,
 With *Shakespear's* wit, and real humour fill'd:
 With pleasure saw presented to our view,
 The only FALSTAFF, *Norwich* ever knew.
 Or in that face with what expressive Boast,
 Lives a resemblance of the *Litchfield* Host;
 With equal grace his FLIP, or WRONGHEAD, shin'd;
 Yet equal merit in his STERLING find.

But

BUT when, (O with gladness wou'd the Muse
Amidst such worth, a single failing lose)
When, to mismanagement he sometimes yield,
A Crown to wear, a Sceptre for to wield:
Then fir'd by rage, with indignation fir'd,
Strait to my thoughts have instantly occur'd,
Some puppet Monarch, who on wires strung,
In all the pomp of Majesty was hung;
Ap'd regal honours, and the pride of Kings;
With aukward gestures, bounces, jerks, and flings,

So often have with dignity misplac'd,
Our tragic Princes, Sovereigns disgrac'd:
And thinking Splendour will alone suffice,
Forgot both King, and Player in a trice——

BUT lest my Muse shou'd here forsake her plan,
And fir'd by Censure, shou'd degrade the man,
On whom before, she gave such praises birth,
Extoll'd his merit, and enlarg'd his Worth;

No thirst for praise, in Characters like those,
 Leads into Error, or creates him foes;
 ——Since then the Ermine he's constrain'd to wear,
 Altho' it may offend; the Actor spare.

WHEN Age, enfeebled and afflicted mourns,
 (The toils of ADAM, or SCIOLTO's groans,
 Suits DOWNING's person and declining pow'rs:)
 There, and there only, can he please for hours.

WHERE INDIANA, conscious that she loves
 The softest passion for her BEVIL, proves;
 Who but in SEALAND, DOWNING, must admire,
 When from the Bracelet, he appears the Sire:
 There filial love, (stamp'd strongly on his face)
 Dispel suspicion, calumny erase:
 Pleas'd, he receives her to a Parent's arms;
 Adore's her virtues, and admires her charms.

But

BUT when a HAMLET, or a ROMEO's youth,
Calls out for vigour, and demands the truth;
Then, to see DOWNING, must excite our rage;
Who spent and breathless pants about the Stage——
Behold that face, which bloated with excess,
That voice decay'd, which scarcely marks the Strefs,
Through DORILANT's sensations, languid pine;
Or vainly thinks in LOVEMORE, for to shine.

IF true politeness in a Part can charm,
Or sense, and elegance, attention arm;
Express, where more compleatly they combine,
Than where Sir CHARLES, thro' Cibber's genius shine!
When the fair MODISH, captivates our Eyes,
Sir CHARLES's Wit, and Raillery we prize;
Or when to injur'd virtue, he atones,
Her wrongs redress, and all his Folly owns.
What nameless graces, here, the Poet shew'd!
What graces, once, from Wilks's action flow'd!

To

R O S C I U S.

Wilks, tho' no more, yet many Actors since,
Have justly glory'd in applause from thence.
Let then oblivion kindly cast a shade
O'er DOWNING's mem'ry, nor my pen degrade
Talents, the muse, perhaps might once adore;
(However true,) I fear can please no more!

SEE BANNISTER, in fam'd MACKHEATH, appears;
(A Character unseen these many years!)
Above, below, around, attraction draws,
Attentive silence, bursting to applause:
Pregnant in merit from each line that flows,
With manly pride, the gallant ruffian glows!
From the bold robber, no fine tortur'd note,
Seems now to warble thro' an Eunuch's throat;
By nature, form'd to grace the muse of *Gay*,
With native energy he fills the Lay,

NOR do we feel less pleasure or delight,
(Thy fame diminish, nor disgust our fight;)

To

R O S C I U S.

To view thy worth in the fantastic scene,
The humourous fallies of a Mimic's brain;
And if ordain'd thro' comic scenes to rove,
Who but thy FACE,* or GIBBY, must approve?
Pleas'd with thy HAWTHORN; BELLAFONT, adore:
Or let thy talents if they ask for more,
Set (in SILENO,) millions in a roar.

OR, shou'd the tragic Muse demand thy aid,
To graver Scenes in eloquence array'd;
Tho' much unequal to thy former fame,
Revolving time shall dignify thy name.

BEHOLD fierce OSMAN, drawn by great *Voltaire*,
Too proud to love; yet conquer'd by the Fair!
Rack'd i'th'extreme, the sharpest anguish bears——
Now thinks he's lov'd, and now again despairs!
Plunges in vengeance: stern remorse succeeds;
The ruin'd, great, unhappy Sultan, bleeds!

* Vide *The Alchymist*.

If here, or in a BAJAZET, thou'rt seen,
 Th' inhuman GLOSTER,† of tyrannic DANE;*
 Then that proud port, and fixt imperious look,
 Betrays no step of dignity mistook,
 There, those furl'd features, and indignant brows,
 With native force, majestic terror shows.

BUT, when some tend'rest passion claims thy care,
 Prompted by love, and yet restrain'd by fear;
 When all subfides in tendernefs and truth,
 The joys of beauty, or the charms of youth;
 That aukward manner, and unfeeling air,
 (How ill they may with fuch a Form compare!)
 Speaks thee unfit in Scenes like those t'engage;
 The coldest Lover, in the warmest Age.

If thy foft senses, Mufic's power can charm,
 And ftrengh of Sound, to admiration warm;

High

† JANE SHORE

* *Maſque of ALFRED.*

High in esteem, DU-BELLAMY, shall stand
In firm support, nor dread the Critic's wand;
Shall, since his talents have such praises bore,
Be long regretted, that he's here no more.

FORM'D for to please in Characters, alone,
Where the pert Coxcomb, bends to Folly's throne;
See DEATH, constrain'd to quit his native cast,
And seeks for fame, where it can never last:
With tortur'd Tragedy, his parts abuse,
And what he wins in One;—In to'ther lose.

THAT merit, which from younger FREEMAN, rise,
Lo! quickly chang'd, in brave NERESTAN dies;
Whil'st WITLING's praises, meets as dire a doom,
When we behold MONESES, or CHAMONT.

CONFIN'D to Comedy, with time his friend,
We yet may have no little to commend;

D

Our

Our unripe hopes a Harveſt may attain,
And bleſt with ſenſe, no ſmall improvement gain.

CHALMERS, a Vet'ran in the comic ſcene;
Approv'd by all, have long reſpected been;
In ſome odd compound, quite grown gray with Age,
Some doating Fool, who yet wou'd fain be ſage;
There CHALMERS' talents, e'er excites our mirth,
And ev'ry auditor admires his worth.

OR ſee, (attentive to a Summer's Tale)
How far the force of humour can prevail!
With pleaſing wonder on Sir 'TONY, gaze,
And hear around one univerſal praiſe.

If Laughter juſtly teſtify applauſe,
When riſing truly from a worthy cauſe;
And not (where rules of decency are broke),
Sprung from ſome low, unmeaning, vulgar joke;

CHALMERS,

R O S C I U S.

15

CHALMERS, in MIDAS must his share receive,
And settled in esteem his fame shall live.

OR when, (th'important Secret just at hand)
Elaps'd in shame, Sir BASHFUL CONSTANT stand!
When as a friend, on LOVEMORE, he repose,
And confidently tells him all he knows;—
There strong conception, in each feature shewn;
Speaks the Comedian, and his merits own.

YET one great fault, I easily descry,
By much too gen'ral to escape the Eye,
A tiresome sameness, thro' his acting run,
And plays too many Characters in one.

CROUSE when display'd i'the illiterate Clown,
Is e'er receiv'd with pleasure by the Town,
In HODGE, or TOUGHSTONE, never fails to please,
And gradual mirth, on ev'ry bosom seize.

BUT often as thou'lt injur'd GLOSTER,* took;
 As oft we've wish'd thee Lady Wrangle's Cook,
 Or when condemn'd thy BUCKINGHAM, to see;
 Have rather wish'd thou'd'lt honest SACKBUT be.
 Yet be advis'd, and incoherence fly,
 Lay CAPULETS, and RODRIGO's by;
 Firmly supported in thy proper cast,
 Without a further aid, thy fame shall last.

WRIGHT, may in Pantomime, our fancy charm,
 May please our sight, or else our fears alarm;
 Through the wide round of grotesque whimsies range,
 While Scenes delights us or Machin'ry change.

BUT if we'd raise alone, the Actor's name;
 His RALPH's the only candidate for fame:
 There inbred rudeness, set in brutal ease,
 In WRIGHT's performance, may be taught to please;
 'Must rest his cause on pantomimic skill——
 But Merit's, Merit; be it where it will.

BUT

* Vide K. Lear.

BUT now let tenfold Candour, guide each thought,
To mark the page with Female strictures fraught;
A nat'ral impulse leads us to commend,
With genial warmth, a something more than Friend;
Beyond all due regard to worth aspire,
And where we cannot praise, would fain admire!

WHEN raging anguish, or a deep despair,
The inmost horrors of the soul declare;
Th' unparell'd graces of an IBBOT's mein,
Enlarge the thought, and dignifies the Scene.

HENCE, great ELIZA, charms upon the stage.
(Her England's pride, and Wonder of the Age)
Dreadfully great, her LADY MACBETH's seen,
And does strict justice, to a Shakespear's pen.

LOOK thro' the round of Characters she bears,
(Blest with applause) what gen'uine worth appears:

E

Extensive

Extensive merit; variously great,

From LADY RANDOLPH, down to MUSLIN's Prate!

WHEN DOUGLAS falls, exclamatory woe,

From the lost Mother agonizing flow!

To what advantage, must she then appear?

How great the Plaudit, in each falling tear!

THO' LOVEGOLD, charm'd us in a *Weston's* days,

IBBOT, in LAPPET, met with equal praise;

Equally great, our fixt attention drew;

From Bench, to Bench, th'applauding whisper flew.

WHETHER in comic scenes t'enlarge our mirth,

Or give in Tragedy, the Passions birth;

Still IBBOT's num'rous requisites we prize,

And views her Fame, on deathless columns rise.

If inborn sense, and elegance can please,

With native dignity, and winning ease;

(A standing Fav'rite, of intrinsic worth,)

We bless the hour, that gave a CHALMERS birth.

THROUGH that sweet Voice, enervate accents glide
From DARNLY'S WIDOW,† or the MOURNING BRIDE;
Can teach the brightest Eye to shed a tear:
The tenderest bosom, to express a fear.

IN Sir Charles EASY's, or Lord TOWNLY'S WIFE;
(Contrasted scenes of elevated Life!)
Where One, domestic happiness disown,
Charm'd by the reigning Follies of the Town.
With ev'ry grace, with ev'ry virtue stor'd,
The other sighs, but to reclaim her Lord.
In each, with what distinction, CHALMERS shines,
But happier still, in *Milton's* heartfelt lines.

SEE in supreme distress, TH'ENCHANTED MAID,*
Beneath the pow'r of Vice, and Magic laid.

E 2

Unconquer'd

† *Mary QUEEN of Scots.*

* *The LADY in Comus.*

Unconquer'd still, to Virtue's precepts true;
 With indignation, the curs'd Sorc'rer view!
 A just disdain, her swelling Bosom fires,
 Impetuous warmth, her nobler Soul inspires!

ON that fine Form, with raptur'd influence gaze,
 And grace such merit, with mellifluent praise:
 Where *Milton* living, he'd thy worth rehearse,
 And make thy Name, immortal as the Verse.

WHEN DEATH, to please Us, treads the vocal walk,
 Then each conceited wou'd be Critic talk;
 T'enlarge her failings or disgust our sight,
 Extol perhaps, a *Vincent*, or a *Wright*;
 Shall praise a *Mattocks*, *Brent*, with rapture name,
 And add new trophies to their well-known fame;
 Vain of their judgment, (O how vain indeed!)
 To some ill tim'd comparison proceed—

BUT

BUT, there are some, so rigidly unkind,
Who ever will be to perfections blind;
Prone to detraction, never will commend!
A Foe invet'rate, but a lukewarm Friend.

CAN'T PATTY's softness feelingly exprest,
By rival passions, tenderly distressed;
The gay MARIA's or ROSSETTA's love,
Excite regard, or win ye to approve?

YET, shou'd they fail, I'd still enhance her name,
And build her praise on more substantial fame;
Whatever fate the Singer might receive,
Conscious of merit, bid the Actress live.

TURN to where *Vanbrug's* looser morals please,
When trebly arm'd with spirit, wit, and ease;
From young CORINNA, what applause deriv'd!
(And wou'd in HOYDEN, where the Play reviv'd.)

WHEN Crouds, by MIDAS fummon'd, throng'd each night,
 Did not this DEATH give infinite delight! *
 Did not her praise conspicuously grow?
 Did not her worth luxuriantly flow?
 Who could behold that Face and not applaud?
 Nor give that well turn'd action due reward.

OR, when the artless fond AMYNTOR, sighs,
 Her genial merit in a DAPHNE rise;
 How ev'ry action from each feature charm?
 How ev'ry breast with admiration warm?
 In justice to her fame support her cause,
 And yield the Crown of merited applause.

BROOKS, in the coarser scenes of vulgar life,
 In low bred AUDREY, or SILENO'S WIFE;
 The Shrewd, or Rustic's, admirably shewn,
 And gives thy comic talents just renown.

With

*In the DAPHNE of that Burletta.

With native humour teach OLD MAIDS* to please,
Or pride, in LADY SYCAMORE, displays.

BUT when the pert Miss JENNY, thou art seen;
That wide deficiency of Voice and Mein,
Of ev'ry Requisite to form the part,
Can ne'er attract the Eye, nor reach the Heart;
Unless with just disdain, t'excite our rage,
And to detest, what never can engage.

COU'D but a Face, alone to fame pretend,
DU-BELLAMY, shou'd find the Muse a friend;
Each imperfection in Oblivion drown'd,
Wou'd spread the worth of each Perfection round:
Nor wou'd to merit (in her AURA) blind,
But to be found impartial, seem unkind.

THAT drawling Tone, that unexpressive Air,
Disgusts our Sight, or grates upon the ear.

F 2

And

* Mrs. Deborah Woodcock.

And where we'd wish t'approve, (those wishes crost,)
Find ev'ry grace in Affectation lost!

HOLLAND, to FANNY,* tho' alone confin'd,
May claim a tribute from each gen'rous mind;
But those who with unbiass'd thought regard,
A Dawn of merit, worthy a reward;
May further search, and find that fame to raise,
In other Scenes, as ample room for praise.

As yet too young, her merit to decide;
But lately known, nor by Experience try'd:
The Muse to DOWNING, wishes as a friend,
That fair Success, may all her steps attend.

THUS, have I freely canvass'd ev'ry name,
Who claim'd the smallest attribute to fame;
Carefully trod with caution to the End,
Nor in the Critic ever lost the Friend.

- HERE

* In the Maid of the Mill.

HERE, then I rest.— And to the candid few,
Humbly present this first Essay to view;
No praise I ask, for conscious of defect,
(A bare acquittance all I can expect!)
No prepossession in its favour soar,
And strikes my Mind, to gloss its Errors o'er:
Just to my plan, “ Impartial to decide;”
The diff’rent Actors, diff’rent merits try’d.

BEYOND my Title’s promise to relate,
’Must leave our new performers to their fate;
Else had my Muse, a WESTRAY’S worth proclaim’d,
With pleasure else, her various merits nam’d:
Mark’d what subsiding tenderness we find
With sensibility, and beauty join’d;
Display’d her various requisites to please,
That winning softness, and enchanting Ease.

ELSE had MOZZEN, and DAVIES, claim'd their share;
'Shou'd due degrees of praise or censure bear—
But since deny'd, accept my wish, instead;
May their attempts, as they desire succeed:
For when an Audience, a dislike reveal,
None but an Actor, knows what Actors feel!

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

PAGE 19, 3d line. for enervate, read energ'ac.



